New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1946

Volume VII, Number 10 • Yearly Subscription $25.00 • Week of June 10, 1946

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Theatre Critics' Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York newspapers

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Published by CRITICS' THEATRE REVIEWS, INC. : 235 EAST 22ND STREET, NEW YORK 10, N. Y.

"The Dancer"

The Sun

JUNE 6, 1946

Abbott Presents 'The Dancer,' a Melodrama About Insanity and Sudden Death.

George Abbott has journeyed far from his usual gay theatrical haunts in sponsoring "The Dancer," which he showed to Broadway for the first time last evening at the Biltmore Theater. In his latest offering the erstwhile maestro of high-speed farce and fast-stepping musicals is seeking to keep the members of his audience on the edge of their chairs, not rocking with mirth.

Probably only a psychiatrist could state whether all is psychologically sound in the thesis which Milton Lewis and Julian Funt are presenting in their play about insanity and sudden death. They offer evidence, however, that they know what ought to go into a taut melodrama; and Everett Sloane, to whom Abbott has handed the director's reins for this occasion, has stressed well its tenser moments. Although sinister in mood, and sometimes thoroughly unpleasant, "The Dancer," however, is exciting for only part of the way.

The central character is a famous male Russian ballet star who has been mad for fifteen years. The action covers only a single evening. The second act picks up where the first left off, and there is only a ten minute interval in time when the final act opens. A girl prostitute has been murdered down the street from the apartment in Paris, where Krainine, the dancer, is being cared for in seclusion by Aubrey Stewart, an English art connoisseur, as the climax of a friendship about which there are dark hints of oddity. Krainine had been left alone at the time of the killing, and a detective promptly drops in.

Stewart's problems are further complicated by the fact that Krainine's wife, a gold digger from America, and their daughter, who has grown to young womanhood since she last saw her father, have at last located his hideout after losing track of him during the war years. The wife is striving to learn the whereabouts of a safety deposit box, to which she has the key, and the daughter, who is planning to marry, wants to find out if her father's illness is hereditary.

Before the final curtain, there have been two more murders, both of them while the audience looks on.

Anton Dolin, who during the tryout tour succeeded Leon Fokine in the difficult role of the demented dancer to whom speech is a rarity, gives a good performance, skillfully avoiding the pitfall of mere grotesqueness in his playing. And he portrays a tortured mind well in his brief dancing. Colin Keith-Johnston plays Stewart, handling the changing moods in the role adroitly, and Luis Van Rooten is a delight as the dogged and unruffled inspector, setting up a model for future stage French detectives to copy. Helen Flint makes a properly brassy wife, and Bethel Leslie brings both conviction and youthful freshness to the part of the daughter.

The setting by Motley lends the right grimness, but the authors chilled me only now and then.

HERRICK BROWN.

'THE DANCER.'

Play by Milton Lewis and Julian Funt; staged by Everett Sloane; production designed by Motley; incidental music by Paul Bowles; presented by George Abbott at the Biltmore Theater Wednesday evening, June 5. The cast:

Henry Wilkins	Edgar Kent
Aubrey Stewart	Colin Keith-Johnston
The Inspector	Luis Van Rooten
Sergei Krainine	Anton Dolin
Madeline Krainine	Bethel Leslie
Catherine Krainine	Helen Flint

Journal and American

JUNE 6, 1946

Offer 'The Dancer' At Biltmore Theatre

By ROBERT GARLAND

Nevertheless, the second play of the new season is better than the first. "The Dancer," which came last night into the Biltmore, is an improvement on "Second Best Bed," which came last Monday into the Barrymore. Where the earlier arrival made capital of the triangular relationship involving Mr. and Mrs. William Shakespeare and Lewis Poggs, the latter makes capital of the triangular relationship involving Mr. and Mrs. Waslaw Nijinsky and Sergei Diaghilev.

In the newer newcomer, Mr. and Mrs. Waslaw Nijinsky are Mr. and Mrs. Sergei Krainine, while Sergei Diaghilev is Aubrey Stewart. Then, after reporting that both Mrs. Shakespeare's cottage in Elizabethan Stratford-on-Avon, against which "Second Best Bed" unfolded, and Mr. Stewart's mansion in postwar Paris-on-Seine, against which "The Dancer" struggles to its toes, are credited to the Motleys, the offerings have little else in common.

Where Mr. and Mrs. Shakespeare's matrimonial mixup tried to be funny, but wasn't, Mr. and Mrs. Krainine's matrimonial mixup tries to be thrilling, but isn't. The retelling of the Waslaw Nijinsky-Romola de Pulszky-Sergei Diaghilev legend in modern dress never quite comes off in the playwriting hands of Milton Lewis and Julian Funt, the play-directing hands of Everett Sloane or the play-producing hands of George Abbott.

* *

Unholy Three

Mr. Lewis and Mr. Funt are most at fault because they have not the skill or, maybe, the understanding, to make their characters three dimensional. Even before the players had a try at them, I doubt if Mr. and Mrs. Sergei Krainine and Aubrey Stewart were more than talking-dolls cut from the pages of a book which had been read carelessly and half-forgotten. In real life, or the likeness of it, theirs would be—and is, as far as it has gone—an all-too-human comic-tragedy.

In "The Dancer," the Aubrey Stewart who could be Sergei Diaghilev has the Sergei Krainine who could be Waslaw Nijinsky in his perverse but potent power, while the Catherine Krainine who could be Romola Nijinsky is plotting and planning for her husband's hidden treasure. But, as mad as the fictitious dancer is supposed to be, he has sense enough to keep the location of the cache to himself, along with the key of the box in which he has stored it.

So what should be an all-too-human comic-tragedy comes to an end as a treasure-hunt in which a perverse impresario and an unpleasant wife are the hunters and a deranged dancer is the hider of the treasure. This deranged dancer is a killer, too, working his way from a stranger up the street in act one, to his wife upstairs in act two, and to his possessive and jealous boy-friend in act three. He is a long time getting to this last one.

* * *

Unhappy Season

Under the Hollywood hand of Everett Sloane, to the accompaniment of Paul Bowles music all this is directed with deliberate devoutness. Up the Motleys' spiral staircase, and down, the playwrights' unholy three go their unholy way until the Catherine Krainine who is Helen Flint is dead upstairs, the Aubrey Stewart who is Colin Keith-Johnston is dead downstairs and the Sergei Krainine who is Anton Dolin is led into custody by the inspector who is Luis van Rooten.

Encouraged by his effectiveness as a speaking actor in "Seven Lively Arts," Mr. Dolin is of surprising excellence as the Sergei Krainine who is not too unlike the living dead man we refer to as Waslaw Nijinsky. The same may be said of Mr. Keith-Johnston as the Aubrey Stewart who is not unlike the fabulous combination of good and evil we refer to as Sergei Diaghilev. They give more to the dramatists than the dramatists give to them. But they are not convincing.

It is the Catherine Krainine who is most consistently incredible, both as written by Mr. Lewis and Mr. Funt and played by Helen Flint. Luis van Rooten provides the evening's most amusing moments as the Inspector who likes his brandy and his bribes, but who gets his man. And there's Edgar Kent as a big blackmailing butler and Bethel Leslie as a beguiling little girl...All my best hopes to the contrary, "The Dancer" leaves me as it found me. And that's not too happy over the Broadway season recently inaugurated.

DAILY NEWS

JUNE 6, 1946

There Are More Broken Spines Than Chilled Ones in 'The Dancer'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

There is no manager practicing on Broadway whose theatrical sense is more vivid than George Abbott's. The punches in the plays and musicals he produces are short, accurate and hard—as they are in "The Dancer," a melodrama which Mr. Abbott presented last evening at the Biltmore Theatre.

But, having seen "The Dancer," a doubt has entered my mind about Mr. Abbott's literary sense, for it seems to me that he has squandered a very good company of six players upon a thriller which is ineptly written. No amount of admirable individual performances, no amount of well-contrived situations, can suffice to make a play if the writing is not also admirable and well-contrived.

Milton Lewis and Julian Funt, the authors, have outlined a scenario which could have been a humdinger in the hands of a Patrick Hamilton or an Emlyn Williams, but which remains no more than an outline for a B-picture for B. Karloff. Their invention falters and their characters, with one exception, are made to speak lines which would have been great in the era of "The Bat." But since "The Bat" we have come up in our melodrama to plays like "Payment Deferred," "Night Must Fall" and "Angel Street," and even the movies have acquired sophisticated skill.

Some Broken Backs.

"The Dancer" is set in an eerie Paris apartment with a steep spiral staircase in the middle of the back wall. In this place live a man of questionable character and means, the man's rather malevolent manservant, and a great ballet dancer who has been insane for 15 years.

Murders occur. The victims get their backs broken. It seems impossible that an emaciated, cringing mute like the dancer could be going around snapping spines, but you never can tell. Not even the sub-inspector of the Paris police department can tell right away. There is, also, an abnormal sex angle involving the desperate affection of the man who has the apartment for his ailing guest—an angle which was much more expertly presented years ago in "The Green Bay Tree."

In the role of the mad dancer is Anton Dolin, one of the two or three top male ballet stars. No stranger to the dramatic stage, either, Mr. Dolin does as good a job of being a pitiful lunatic as one could ask, and once or twice he comes out of his maniacal stupor to dance a bit to some excellently weird music by Paul Bowles.

Policeman Excellent.

Colin Keith-Johnston plays the dancer's protector with all the intensity he showed in the dugout in "Journey's End." Edgar Kent is a manservant right out of a hair-raising Charles Addams drawing, and Helen Flint has some vivid moments as a woman who deserves to get murdered—and gets it. Bethel Leslie appears as the mad hoofer's daughter. And the best of the company, both in the writing and the playing, is the police inspector, as portrayed by Luis van Rooten. I've been up against French cops and I ought to know.

The direction is not, as you might expect, by Mr. Abbott. It is by Everett Sloane, long-time Abbott actor and general assistant, Mr. Sloane's work is okay and he should go right on up the line like that other gentleman graduate of Abbott Academy, Garson Kanin. The setting is by the Motleys, and therefore just right.

New York World-Telegram

JUNE 6, 1946

Story of 'The Dancer' Holds Audience in Grip

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

It is always a pleasure to see a production that does just what it set out to do, and "The Dancer", which George Abbott presented last night, does just that.

This show is a melodrama, a gripping one with menace, doubt and fury. It never pretends to be a great play but it is an absorbing one and an intense one. No pins were dropped at the Biltmore last night because if they had the crash would have echoed through the theater.

"The Dancer" quite frankly paraphrases the story of the famous ballet artist whose mind is gone. Serge Krainine has been out of his mind for 14 years and has not spoken for three months when the story starts.

In Care of Fanatic.

He has been in the care of a once rich dilettante, Aubrey Stewart, who has a fanatical and none too natural devotion to him. Just as it is becoming clear that Serge was responsible for the killing of a prostitute in the neighborhood whose back was broken, his wife and daughter turn up.

The daughter Madeline has suffered a breakdown and wants to find out whether his madness is hereditary, before she marries. Catherine, his wife, has the key to a vault where his fortune is hidden, and wants to find out where it is.

The play revolves around the efforts of these two to fulfill their respective purposes, and Stewart's desperate determination to shield Serge, and keep the mad dancer in his own charge.

It is suggested that Catherine's lust for money was an important contribution to Serge's insanity. Stewart uses this knowledge against her with hair raising effect. When he tries to turn the same trick on Madeline, his plan boomerangs with back breaking results.

"The Dancer" is a clean cut play, hewing to the line of its story. Its action is consecutive, and the exposition necessary for the full embroiderment of the tale is reasonably injected. The suspense is immediate, and the somber tenseness of it all is relieved by frequent laughs.

No one could be better equipped for the central role than is Anton Dolin. A master of pantomime and a brilliant dancer to start with, he makes the play absorbingly convincing with his volatile portrayal.

His Stature Grows.

In transition from the gaunt groping mute to the active artist, he grows in stature before your eyes. He lets his technique falter as it should for the story's purposes. His great leap and collapse seem in this setting much more terrifying than it does in "Giselle" on the ballet stage.

If Dolin occasionally appears to enjoy being a bit of a ham in the Karloff manner, he is perfectly justified. This is just the place for such tactics.

Colin Keith-Johnston glacially portrays the inhibited and twisted Stewart, who would keep the mad dancer under his thumb. He is playing a tricky game under desperate circumstances. His tension, his fear and his unbalanced determination are admirably projected.

Luis Van Rooten gives the police inspector a suavity and a wily humor. With Gallic philosophizing and an earthy French attitude, he is a pleasant fellow to cling to in this household of neurotics.

Helen Flint is raspingly comic as the dancer's wife. Hers is a brief appearance but with her callous and mercenary behavior she effectively motivates the whole story.

Bethel Leslie is pleasant and credible as the daughter and Edgar Kent is properly dour as the butler.

Paul Bowles has written some fine eerie music for "The Dancer." When Dolin's mind is stirred to dancing, the tortured jangling strains really sound like weird refrains in a turbulent memory.

Circular Staircase.

Motley, as is becoming usual, has created a thoroughly appropriate setting for the play. This room in a Paris house is gloomy, and as the Inspector remarks, seems to smell of threats and violence. There is a circular staircase in the room that almost becomes one of the leading characters.

Everett Sloane has directed the play so that it holds your attention consistently. One might have wished Stewart's preparations for Catherine's entertainment were a little more furtive.

Milton Lewis and Julian Funt have contrived a tight bit of theater in this opus, which might be subtitled "What Cooks With the Mad Ballerino". They indulge in certain not too reasonable elements, such as the Inspector's unexplained behavior in the last act, and the character of the daughter, who seems an unlikely product of her parents.

But if it is unashamed and spine tingling melodramatics you want, this is it.

****

The New York Times

JUNE 6, 1946

Melodrama of Abnormal

By LEWIS NICHOLS

Putting aside his more normal pursuits for the moment, George Abbott last evening stood sponsor for the abnormal. "The Dancer," by Milton Lewis and Julian Funt, is a melodrama with killings and a key to a safety box containing a great deal of money. It is more, indeed, for it also is a melodrama with madness. What Mr. Abbott seems to lack in his new enterprise at the Biltmore, however, is a play that is gripping or makes quite enough sense. "The Dancer" is one of those unhappy affairs that set out to excite but through tortured writhings too often only amuse. It is an invitation to a snigger rather than to a macabre dance.

There is no question that the man of the title is in a sorry state. One time a famous dancer, he has been mad for fifteen years. He is living with a once-wealthy man, and no doubt a clinical survey would suggest something odd in their relationship. When he has had a drink he hears ballet music. This affects him in one of two ways—he either dances a few steps, or he commits a murder. The music at the Biltmore is intermittent, and the list of victims perhaps may most fairly be left the secret of the management.

A cool, police analysis eventually would arrive at the conclusion that "The Dancer" needs a couple more sound explanation than it offers, and one or two honest characters. You have your own choice of why Sergei went mad. Turning this over leisurely in the mind, you suddenly are confranted with the key to the box. Sub-plot: Where is the box, with the long-not-seen wife and the gentleman friend trying to find out? There also is a daughter, and her interest in her father's condition is less filial than frankly expressed. She has had an offer for her hand, and wonders whether the madness is hereditary. The plot is moxed up quite a little bit.

At work on the fringes of this dervish, the players have a difficult evening. Anton Dolin takes the part of the dancer, going at it with sincerity but forced by conditions to fight a retreating battle. He dances only a few steps, by the way; it is an acting role rather than that to which he is accustomed. Luis Van Rooten, in the part of a police inspector, is likable; his is a good part and he plays it well. Colin Keith-Johnson is the gentleman who has cared for the dancer. The script doesn't tell him to be either a villain or a hero, and so the actor leaves that point open. Bethel Leslie is the daughter and Helen Flint, the wife. The Motley setting is good, although a large deal of the play's actual action takes place away from it, out of sight.

New York Herald Tribune

JUNE 6, 1946

= By HOWARD BARNES =

Ballet Plus Murder

A HOMICIDAL homosexual takes the stage in "The Dancer." Since he was once a great dancer, like Nijinsky, and is as mad as a hatter, he gives the new offering at the Biltmore fits and starts of excitement. Milton Lewis and Julian Funt have cooked up quite a repellent core of horror for their melodrama. George Abbott has served it more pretentiously than artfully in his production. The players, when they are not being killed, read their lines with reasonable proficiency, but the lines have a way of bothering them. In short, the show strives desperately to be an esoteric bit of grand guignol only to wind up as unpleasant bore.

* * *

"The Dancer" is not a musical, by any means, but the most rewarding moments in the offering occur when Anton Dolin rouses himself from psychiatric lethargy and executes some tricky steps to off-stage music composed by Paul Bowles. The transition from schizophrenia to sanity through an artist's recollection of his great talent might have been made the springboard for a savage and searching psychological thriller. The authors, after a fairly brave start, have ditched their pathological promise for the most obvious sort of blood-and-thunder nonsense an dthe players do little to keep the drama from thudding rather heavily on the Biltmore stage.

* * *

Aside from Dolin, who remains a far finer dancer than an actor, Luis Van Rooten is the inspiration for the little that is worth watching in "The Dancer." As a methodical French policeman, whose careful checking up on the murder of a prostitute results in the slaughter of the climax, he achieves a characterization which is cynically engaging. Since he arrives on cue in the course of the violent doings and has to assert that he was able to smell murder on his first visit to a charnel and perverted booby hatch, he has no easy task. It is to his great credit that he preserves what fragments of honest melodrama lurk around the sets on Forty-seventh Street.

* * *

Colin Keith-Johnston is to be commiserated with in his role of an aging fruit who gets his mad boy friend to kill his wife. Helen Flint strides through the latter part with more brazen assurance than conviction and Bethel Leslie is well in over her head as the daughter of the nutty ballet dancer. Everett Sloane gets credit for the direction, but it is not the sort of staging that holds a bad script in hand. "The Dancer" induges in entre-chats and straight back-breaking, but it has little to recommend it in the field of horror or amusement.

New York Post

JUNE 6, 1946

'The Dancer' Finds Abbott Abandoning Comedy for—?

By Vernon Rice

George Abbott, stepping out of the role of a producer of comedy hits, brought into the Biltmore last night a new play by Milton Lewis and Julian Funt, "The Dancer."

Just what "The Dancer" is, that caused Mr. Abbott to abandon comedy, was never firmly established. One thing, however, is certain. It is no comedy.

One part clinical study of a demented mind, one part murder mystery melodrama and one part key-hole peep at an unnatural relationship (yes, we mean what you mean), yet the three parts never quite get together so that the play can be one thing or another.

The clinical study never gets very clinical, the murder part gets more melodrama than mystery and the relationship angle never uses the naughty words so one can be quite sure.

For the first act "The Dancer" has the same horrible fascination that the first half hour of the tour through the State Institute for the Insane with the college sociology class had, but like that tour, after the first half-hour revulsion sets in and enough is enough. One leaves the theatre feeling as though he has seen something pretty macabre; he also leaves longing for a good, strong breath of fresh air.

Paris Not Necessarily in Spring

The setting for all the ghoulish goings-on is an apartment in Paris wherein dwell Aubrey Stewart, a financially embarrassed art connoisseur and dilettante, and Sergei Krainine, his friend with the unsound mind, once of the ballet, more recently of an institution. It has been 15 years since he has danced, three years since he has spoken.

Into the apartment during the course of the evening come a French police inspector, for a murder of a prostitute in a brothel a few houses down the street has been committed, Sergei's estranged wife and their daughter. The wife comes because she has the key to something that holds over a hundred thousand dollars of Sergei's, but she doesn't know what or where that something is.

The daughter comes because she wants to find out if there are any more at home like him. She hasn't seen her father since she was two, and meanwhile, she has fallen in love and she wants to be sure there aren't.

Before the play is over Sergei hears some of Paul Bowles' music and dances like the mad thing that he is, he speaks and he murders his wife as well as his keeper, and gets arrested, we think, for the murder of the prostitute.

Motley created an apartment full of atmosphere of Paris and one suggesting the fine night for murder that it turned out to be. Everett Sloane, actor turned director, puts the actors through their suspenseful paces in workman-like fashion, and the cast, apparently, followed his instructions to a letter and turned in creditable performances all along the line.

The surprise of the evening, of course, was Anton Dolin, as the mad dancer, Sergei Krainine. He proved beyond any question of doubt that he can act as well as he can dance. His characterization stirred feelings that turned from abomination to sympathy.

Colin Keith-Johnston was properly offensive to be effective as Aubrey Stewart; Helen Flint, playing Sergei's wife, had just the right amount of tartnesss; Luis van Rooten, enacting the role of the Inspector, could have come from Paris instead of Cleveland; Bethel Leslie as Sergei's daughter had the necessary naivety and girlish charm, and Edgar Kent was good enough as Stewart's unpaid Man Friday to spend the rest of his life being cast in Jeves' roles.

If the playwrights had contributed as much as the designer, director and the cast, "The Dancer" might have been a fairly hair-raising evening in the theatre.

As it is, it is strike two of 1946-'47 season's new inning.

There will be plenty of people, by the way, who will jump to the conclusion that the character of Sergei is Nijinsky. There are lines plant-d, however, in the play that say he isn't.

PM EXCLUSIVE

JUNE 7, 1946

—*Kronenberger*—

Everything But Enough Thrills

PM Reviews

George Abbott's new production is certainly not short-handed on macabre materials. It boasts a mad ballet dancer, a pathological sex relationship, a rapacious hunt for a safety-deposit box, a butler who turns blackmailer—and three murders. It boasts, besides, a dimly lighted, highly atmospheric Motley set featuring a very grey and Gothic spiral staircase that is constantly in use.

Yet this ghoulish inventory never chills you; it just leaves you extremely cold. *The Dancer* is indifferently written and murkily projected—the more things that come to light, the more things seem left unexplained. Even so, the play might have got away without making too much sense had it churned up enough excitement. But almost all of it is slow-moving and large parts of it are dull; its characters seem neither tragic nor fascinating; and after a first act that tolerably whets your curiosity, things slump apart, and seem more silly, at times, than sinister.

• • •

Krainine, the ballet dancer, has been tended through 15 years of madness by a sexually abnormal art connoisseur named Stewart. Earlier Stewart had turned Krainine against women in general and his wife in particular—in this way, perhaps, helping to bring on the dancer's illness. Now, in the course of a single evening in Stewart's Paris house, all kinds of things happen: Krainine is suspected of the murder of a neighboring prostitute, his wife turns up trying to get her hands on his money, his daughter turns up desperately trying to learn whether his madness is hereditary, Stewart provokes Krainine into murdering his wife, and at length is murdered himself.

All this, I'm afraid, just rolls off your knife; and the production, while fairly competent, is not compensating. As Krainine, Anton Dolin has to dance now and then, and dances well; but though he acts the part passably, too, he never makes a real figure of it. In the key role of Stewart, Colin Keith-Johnston gives a good enough straightforward performance; but what is really called for is a subtle and silky one. The acting honors go easily to Luis Van Rooten who, as a police inspector, gets real spin and liveliness into his part; it is only when he is on stage that the audience draws close to the play.

—LOUIS KRONENBERGER

"Second Best Bed"

The New York Times

JUNE 4, 1946

Annie Shouldn't Live Here

By LEWIS NICHOLS

Obviously the dog days are here and are growling fiercely at the door. "Second Best Bed," which arrived at the Barrymore last evening, formed the technical start of the new season, and it is good to have that sort of beginning over with immediately. For N. Richard Nash, the author, has been probing the home life of Shakespeare without paralleling the scope of that predecessor's plays; and Ruth Chatterton and others act it out without paralleling the Old Vic. "Second Best Bed," to start the season on a low and brief note, is a silly and tedious affair.

The title is taken from Shakespeare's will, which left Anne Hathaway only the second best bed. Mr. Nash adopts the theory that the Shakespeares really got along together, the note in the will being a term of endearment and not the final statement of a man who had been away from home quite a time. Mr. Nash's Anne is a coy baggage, and his Will is a character given to quoting from an Elizabethan poet and playwright of the same name. One figure notes with awe, "You are with him a single day and you talk like he talks"—and thereafter most of the players do indeed try to talk like he talks. University groups put on plays like this, too.

The one performer who keeps a clean reputation in "Second Best Bed" is Richard Dyer-Bennet, who as a ballad singer isn't trapped into the dialogue. Miss Chatterton makes Anne a bit like Miss Fontanne playing Miss Fontanne; Barry Thomson is roguish as Will; Ralph Forbes is a puffing and blowing Lewis Poggs—whom Anne is to marry if she divorces Will. Elizabeth Eustis plays the part of a young lady of commendable looks but disreputable virtue, and there are various townsfolks including one named Yorick. Shakespearean scholars probably will settle for the skull rather than Yorick, quick, and for any other Stratford bed but the second best.

"Second Best Bed"

A new three-act comedy by N. Richard Nash was presented last night by Ruth Chatterton and John Huntington at the Barrymore. It was directed by Miss Chatterton and the playwright with one set and costumes by Motley.

THE CAST

Ballad Seller	Richard Dyer-Bennet
Nell Garris	Elizabeth Eustis
Penny Brushell	Peter Boyne
Yorick	Ralph Cullinan
Anne Hathaway Shakespeare's	Ruth Chatterton
Lewis Poggs	Ralph Forbes
Squire Simon Lummis	Howard Fischer
The Beadle	Max Stamm
Will Shakespeare	Barry Thomson
Master Yarrow	John McKee
Farmer Loggs	Jefferson Coates
Michael, the Tavern Keeper	Ralph Sumpter
Hardip Ben	John Clay

SYNOPSIS—The entire action of the play takes place in the combination "main room" and "parlor" in Anne Hathaway's cottage, Shottery, parish of old Stratford-on-Avon, Warwickshire. Act I: A day in early June, midmorning. Act II: The next day, toward nightfall. Act III: Early the next morning; time, the beginning of the seventeenth century.

New York Post

JUNE 4, 1946

'Second Best Bed' Officially Opens New 1946-'47 Season

By Vernon Rice

What can one say about a bad play except that it is bad?

And if there is anything more to be said, what good would it do?

There are enough heartaches in the theatre under the least trying circumstances, so much hard work involved, so much expense. A person always has faith in a play, or he would never go through the rigors these days of getting it on the boards.

Ruth Chatterton must have had faith in N. Richard Nash's "Second Best Bed," which opened at the Barrymore last night, for she not only co-produced it with John Huntington but she took one of the leading roles and directed it with Mr. Nash, as well.

To have one's faith destroyed in something is a pretty gruelling experience, and yet, in the case of "Second Best Bed" it is bound to happen. A tiresome, talky, uninteresting play can find no champions, and even if not a line was ever written about it, the public would still find out. The word-of-mouth business works two ways.

So the kindest thing today is just to say for the records that "Second Best Bed" has to do with Shakespeare and a return visit he makes from London to Ann Hathaway when he hears that she is about to divorce him to marry a bailiff-to-be.

The title comes from the Bard's last will and testament in which he makes no mention of Anne except "I give unto my wife my second best bed . . ."

One gathers from the play that it was his favorite.

Motley executed a handsome set and costumes. Miss Chatterton played Anne, Barry Thomson, Shakespeare and Ralph Forbes, Lewis Poggs, the aspiring bailiff. Richard Dyer-Bennet was brought in to sing some ballads (one, his own composition) during each of the three acts and Elizabeth Eustis was given the task of playing one of those lusty Elizabethan wenches.

Miss Chatterton and Mr. Nash directed the piece as though each line was a gem and each scene a memorable one.

As the first offering of the new 1946-47 season "Second Best Bed" can give other productions something from which to work up. It has the distinction of being the first and newest low.

****

PM EXCLUSIVE

JUNE 5, 1946

—*Kronenberger*—

Shakespeare As a Cut-Up

PM Reviews

The 1946-47 theatrical season opened quite recklessly on Monday night with a play about Shakespeare. It is a thoroughly deplorable composition, unless it's a purely malicious one—the work of some determined Baconian who wished to show that Shakespeare couldn't possibly have written the plays. Indeed, the Shakespeare whom Mr. Nash has dreamed up for the stage could scarcely have written *Second Best Bed*.

Very, very little is authentically known about Shakespeare's life, of course—so that whoever wants to can dream up virtually any sort of Bard he chooses. But it's pretty hard to believe that Mr. Nash's Shakespeare had anything to do with the man who wrote *Hamlet*, or even *The Two Gentlemen of Verona;* and what's worse, his Shakespeare wholly fails to make up in charm what he lacks in credibility. He's a roguish dog who, flushed with success in London, drops back for one of his fleeting visits to Stratford and Anne Hathaway, and plays Mr. Fixit and Mr. Mess-It-Up in about equal proportions before scampering back to the Globe. He and Anne are portrayed as turbulently, but affectionately, at odds; and in the course of turning Stratford on its ear, Will quashes Anne's plans to divorce him and marry a local clodhopper named Poggs.

The whole thing, which boasts a strumpet, a ballad singer and a rustic with a hare lip, bobbles about, getting nowhere in particular. A good deal of it is farcical without being funny; some of it is suggestive without being witty. Now and then, to keep his franchise, Shakespeare drops into a kind of murmurous blank verse, with allusions to Nature; but he soon snaps out of it and is on the frisk again.

As the Shakespeares, Ruth Chatterton and Barry Thomson stood in no awe of their historic roles; I'm afraid they were even a bit on the cute side. But, considering their lines, they could scarcely help being.

—LOUIS KRONENBERGER

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

JUNE 4, 1946

= *By* HOWARD BARNES =

And So to Bed

SHAKESPEARE'S genius is likely to survive the feeble biographical boomerang which has drifted into the Ethel Barrymore Theater. "Second Best Bed" pretends to analyze a supposed turbulent reconciliation with Anne Hathaway, the wife to whom he willed the article of the title. N. Richard Nash has made the Bard an aging cut-up, arriving in Stratford-on-Avon from triumphs at the Globe Theater just in time to break up Anne's second marriage to a local clod. He has plucked lines from Shakespeare's dramas at random to show the white hot instant of literary creation. There is nothing white hot about the dialogue which envelops them. There is nothing in the acting at the Barrymore to make one think that the play should have been written in the first place.

• • •

For "Second Best Bed" invites all the quips one might be tempted to make about the title. It has a moment or two of rowdy excitement as Will gets the whole village drunk, including the spinsters, in an effort to recapture his first glow of romance with Anne. It has some pleasant settings and costumes by Motley. Beyond these fugitive seductions it is a somnolent and tasteless entertainment. Ruth Chatterton works hard to make Mrs. Shakespeare a shrewish and hot-blooded matron whose magnetism was always drawing her husband back from London, but it is not to her credit that she is at her best when she is breaking crockery. Barry Thomson plays the dramatist with more clownish enthusiasm than authority and Ralph Forbes, as the fall guy, is neither funny nor sympathetic.

The author has not been at all certain about his dramatic objective. At times he appears to be recreating a plausible comedy about Shakespeare's somewhat mythological married life. At others, he would seem to be having fun at the Bard's expense, particularly when he has Thomson starting off with: "The quality of mercy is not strained," and adding "and so on, and so on." "Second Best Bed" is an untidy dramatic jumble. At the end of the first act there were those in the first night who wondered what could possibly be dreamed up for two more stanzas. There are two more acts, but they add up to three too many.

• • •

Miss Chatterton, who is co-producer and co-director of "Second Best Bed" as well as its leading actress, might have found a more propitious venture for her return to Broadway performing. As it is, she speaks some strange seventeenth-century English dialect in which such phrases as "coom along naow" may be detected and is alternately annoyed at and bemused by her not inconsiderable spouse. The only member of the company who manages to escape the drama's lethargy is Richard Dyer-Bennett, who sings old English songs while whanging a guitar and promptly retreats into the buttery. "Second Best Bed" might deserve to be called impertinent if it were better. It is just woefully bad, in both writing and execution.

The Sun

JUNE 4, 1946

'Second Best Bed,' a Trivial and Tedious Comedy, Has Premiere Here.

It was Ruth Chatterton night at the Ethel Barrymore Theater last night as N. Richard Nash's comedy, "Second Best Bed," had its New York premiere there. Not only did the play serve to set her to acting once more on a Broadway stage after an absence of six years, but the occasion also found her officiating as co-producer and co-director of the evening's offering.

She gets the usual good mark today for her playing, but unfortunately the same grade can't be put down for her in her other two contributions, for the work she and John Huntington are sponsoring is a trivial and tedious little charade and the leisurely pace she and the author have established for it in their direction does not help overcome its glaring deficiencies.

Its title, so the program explains, comes from a line in William Shakespeare's will, which it quotes as follows: "Itm: I gyve vnto my wief my second best bed . . ." and its theme is how the famous playwright makes a sudden visit to Stratford-on-Avon from London to keep Anne Hathaway from divorcing him to take as her second husband one Lewis Poggs, a dull and pompous weakling who has his heart fixed above all else on getting the post of baliff.

It is possible that in more skilled hands than those of the author from Hollywood the idea could be whipped up into something frothy and amusing, even employing some of the plot tricks he uses, but it would take a better Shakespeare than Nash has drawn and a lot better dialogue to put it across. His stock characters, his far from subtle lines of double entendre and his lifting of some of the bard's more familiar quotations aren't sufficient by a wide margin.

When the script permits, Miss Chatterton, as Anne, shows that the years away have not dulled her skill as a player, but even she cannot bring sparkle to speeches that have no luster. According to what the other characters tell about him, Shakespeare is quite a fellow, but Nash makes him so only by hearsay, and as Barry Thomson plays him he is merely a coy figure. Nash's Poggs is a role to throw most any actor, and as a result Ralph Forbes spends quite an unhappy evening wrestling with it.

Elizabeth Eustis, however, is at all times convincing as a trollop and Ralph Cullinan is natural and earthy as Yorick, a handyman. In fact, Yorick's description of seeing himself portrayed in one of Shakespeare's plays (the name "Hamlet" escapes him for a while) while on a visit to London is one of the very few genuinely amusing moments the comedy affords. Richard Dyer-Bennet sings pleasantly some Elizabethan ballads and one of his own as a ballad seller.

For the background Motley has provided a cross section of Anne Hathaway's seventeenth century cottage which is charming enough to house something far better than "Second Best Bed."

HERRICK BROWN.

New York World-Telegram

JUNE 4, 1946

Shakespeare's Will Gives Comedy Title

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

"Second Best Bed" is an idea for a neat short short story, spun with a lot of jiggery-pokery into a three-act play.

The title comes from Shakespeare's will, in which he left same to his wife, Anne Hathaway. In a plot to which not even the Bard would have descended, Will hears of Anne's impending divorce from him, and marriage to a Bailiff in Avon, one Poggs.

Will had left Anne some years before and spent his time getting material in London. He returns temporarily, determined to rupture the Hathaway-Poggs coalition.

When Anne stiff arms him, Will buys the inn and gets the whole town drunk. Absorbed in his efforts to keep Anne in escrow, he repulses the town strumpet, Nell, who thereupon has him arrested.

More Complications.

The wily William has evidence of an old paternity charge against the Squire, and black markets his release with it. When Poggs objects, Will goads the Squire into voiding Poggs' bailiwick.

The resultant Poggs binge is turned to her own advantage by Nell, who is about to be thrown out of town for her pains when Will tells her she is the Squire's daughter. He prods Poggs into proposing to Nell to save himself, thereby ruining the erstwhile Bailiff with Anne.

Satisfied about the proprietorship of Anne, the playwright goes back to London to get more material.

All this might very well have happened. But the unveiling of a pair of feet of clay is a process that requires a ring of authenticity, dignified curiosity or great wit. See "Lincoln in Illinois," "Family Portrait" or "Amphytrion," respectively.

Leers Left Alone.

"Second Best Bed" veers toward the last classification, but it is more frank than funny. It is set in a bawdy time and talks like it. To the credit of the cast it should be said that the frequent references to anatomy and workaday concupiscence are tripped off the tongue with a leerless gusto.

This very virtue works against the play's commercial chances. Where "Second Best Bed" might have accrued a reputation as a shocker, its candidness is so quickly acceptable as the rule of the day that not a gasp or a titter greets its flamboyant conversation.

The author, N. Richard Nash, uses a precious trick of making Shakespeare break archly into poetic language. In this domestic set up, no one would expect him to wonder whether he should be or not be, or to auction his kingdom for a horse. But in soulful moments it is hard to believe that he would sound like a paraphrase of Swinburne.

Just Follows Plot.

Ruth Chatterton knows what she is about on the stage, and when she has anything to do, lends the show a feeling of authority. As Anne Hathaway, her argument with Will over her age is the brightest spot of the evening, and that entirely due to her playing.

Like all the other parts, the Chatterton role lacks any perceptive characterization. Anne is just what the contrived plot demands that she be, and nothing more.

In the second act Miss Chatterton lets fly with a fit of laughing and another of weeping, both so skillful and convincing that they ought to scare most young actresses right out of their profession. But that is not much banquet for an established star.

Elizabeth Eustis does a rousing job as Nell, the Avon blonde most likely to succeed, a gal with a single-track mind who makes no bones about it.

Buffoon in Adversity.

As Anne's intended, Bailiff Poggs, Ralph Forbes gives the buffoon in adversity a broad and crotchety performance.

Barry Thomson never quite brings this ladies' man version of Shakespeare down to earth. Perhaps that was an impossible job to start with.

Richard Dyer-Bennet contributes his Elizabethan songs at pleasant intervals. They seem less quaint and lustier than they do in his night club appearances.

Peter Boyne, Ralph Cullinan and Howard Fischer do what they can with none too colorful roles.

There is a charming and credible set for the show done by Motley, which has also designed the costumes.

Journal-American

JUNE 4, 1946

'Second Best Bed' At the Barrymore

By ROBERT GARLAND

The "Second Best Bed," or "Up in Anne Hathaway's Room," which has followed the out-going "Pygmalion" into the Ethel Barrymore, tries hard to be all up and daring throughout a practically endless evening. Not once does it manage to succeed. Instead, it merely manages to be dirty and dull, quite often at the same time. As a next to season-closer, it leaves 1945-1946 less praiseworthy than it found it. And that's a shame!

Ruth Chatterton, as co-producer, co-director and co-featured player, does but little to uplift the self-styled "new comedy" credited to N. Richard Nash. Usually a lady of taste and talent in her world of professional make-believe, Miss Chatterton is ill at ease, out of place and visibly unhappy in a play, a part and a predicament with which she should have had no truck in the first place. And that, believe me, is another shame!

This "Second Best Bed" has been touring the hinterland. From Schenectady, from Detroit, from points as far west as Chicago, reports made note of the piece's "promise," a promise invisible and unfulfilled last night in W. 47th st. And this despite the fact that, a year or more ago, it won a prize from California's Leland Stanford University. It will never win a prize from New York City's Broadway. Which is not a shame!

• • •

Hey, Nonny, Nonny

With none of the best intentions, "Second Best Bed" sets out to tell how Anne Hathaway, she of Shottery in the parish of Stratford-on-Avon, is married to William Shakespeare and betrothed to Lewis Poggs simultaneously. Will is a rising young playwright from the bankside of London, while Lewis is a rising young bailiff from the backside of her native village. What she sees in either must remain a mystery to me.

But, for purposes of the playwright, Anne is torn like anything between the two. While Lewis is in the midst of wooing her where, if George Jean Nathan will forgive me, the Avon flows, Will comes down from London and wins her with his fine poetic hand. Frankly, the hapless Hathaway is the wearer of the parish's roundest heels, an Elizabethan pushover where husband or boy-friend is concerned. Love's opportunist, she. And two-timer.

Be this as it is, Anne and Will and Lewis are surrounded with as unpleasant a collection of early Seventeenth Century yokels as even England could produce. From Nell Garris, who is a bad girl with good ideas, through Yorick, who furnished Hamlet with his celebrated skull, to Harelip Ben, the boy-about-town who is studying to be a nitwit, Mr. Nash's Stratford-on-Avonions are characters to avoid. But definitely!

• • •

And No! No! No!

You can't avoid them, however, not at the Ethel Barrymore. For, under the joint direction of Ruth Chatterton, player, and Richard Nash, playwright, they are unavoidable. In costumes provided by the Motleys, against backgrounds provided by the same, they say their say with more distinctness than dispatch. Over and over again. And the say they say hits dirtily and dully below the belt, trying to be funny and failing dismally.

Richard Dyer-Bennet, "listed in Burke's Peerage as the descendant of one of England's noble families," gives forth some ballads which go far toward proving that what the programs print is true. Elizabeth Eustis, listed in the New Orleans Blue Book as the descendant of one of Louisiana's noble families, pretends to be a bad girl with a good idea as if to the manner born. John Gay, as a would-be nitwit, does Los Angeles' City College credit.

Barry Thomson's Will has no real sense of "Hamlet," "A Winter's Tale" or even the more dismal parts of "Henry IV" about him. If this is Shakespeare, then N. Richard Nash is a playwright. Ralph Forbes is definitely astray as Lewis Poggs. And Miss Chatterton needs all her charm, all her beauty and all her skill to endow Anne Hathaway with even the phoney odor of believability. This is the evening's greatest shame. It's fatal!

DAILY NEWS

JUNE 4, 1946

Shakespeare a Raffish Lover but A Dubious Writer in '2d Best Bed'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Since nobody knows a great deal about what William Shakespeare really was like, I suppose N. Richard Nash, a Hollywood writer, knows at least as much about him as I do.

In "Second Best Bed," which was offered at the Barrymore last evening, Mr. Nash presents a Shakespeare who is a combination of John Barrymore playing Don Juan and Cesar Romero playing Cesar Romero.

The production, very handsome as to its set and costumes by Motley, has been made by Ruth Chatterton and John Huntington, and Miss Chatterton acts Will's wife, Anne Hathaway, with charm and salty humor. It is always an occasion for gratitude when Miss Chatterton appears in a theatre, but I do wish I could believe more of the play than I did.

"Second Best Bed" is, I guess, a romantic comedy, but in the third act it slides off into rather lame farce. Anne Hathaway remains true to character throughout, but Shakespeare seems not so hot either as a lover or as the greatest poet of our language. He is just a gay fellow who has come from London on his annual visit to his wife in Stratford for an annual resumption of the family relationship.

Once-a-Year Husband.

Biographers don't agree on much about Master Will, but they do agree that he did leave Anne Hathaway, eight years his senior, and went to London and got into show business. (By then she had presented him with twins, but the twins don't figure in last night's play.) And biographers do say that he did come back to Stratford once a year.

This time—in the play— he finds Anne betrothed to Lewis Poggs, an Elizabethan Babbitt who yearns to become town bailiff. Queen Elizabeth has okayed divorce, so Anne is all set. Shakespeare gaily and gallantly sets about making a fool of Poggs and making progress with his wife. The progress is fairly slow because there are three acts in the play—but he makes it. Not, however, before Anne breaks a demijohn over his head, has him arrested and orders him back to London a dozen times with considerable temper.

There are other Elizabethan characters, including a ballad singer who turns up with a modern guitar and sings some naughty period songs. Richard Dyer-Bennet, the singer, is very good, and I want to add some of his records to my Burl Ives collection.

Title from Will's Will.

There are also a young tramp housemaid, pertly played by Elizabeth Eustis; a field servant, Yorick (he reports that Master Will put him in one of his plays, only he was dead), played by Ralph Cullinan, and sundry sheriffs, tavern keepers and hare-lipped townsfolk.

As Poggs, Anne's suitor, Ralph Forbes is very good until the author leads him into too-absurd situations. Barry Thomson portrays Shakespeare with the Barrymore-Romero dash, but I never believed he could write a play.

The title of "Second Best Bed" comes from Shakespeare's will, which left dozens of meticulously itemized bequests to descendants, relatives and theatrical friends, but whose only mention of his wife is, "It'm: I gyve unto my wief my second best bed." Some biographers think this was a nasty slap at Anne. Others think it was a compliment, since naturally the best bed would be for guests and the second-best for more chummy slumber. Mr. Nash is one of the others.

Last night, after Will had had his will, he went gaily off to London again, singing "Hey nonny no." And Chapman went regretfully to his typing machine to write hey nonny—but no.

New York Theatre Critics' Reviews

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A Valuable and Authoritative Record of the Contemporary Theatre

"Around the World"

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

JUNE 1, 1946

= By HOWARD BARNES =

Not Worth the Fare

ORSON WELLES has quite a field day for himself in "Around the World." He has adapted the Jules Verne novel to the musical comedy stage with prankish enthusiasm, combining silent movies, Hoboken melodramatic satire, a magic show and Olsen and Johnson japes in a singular potpourri. Not content with that, he takes over all sorts of redolent roles at the drop of a hat, rushing around the stage with six-shooters, or out into the audience to grab a protesting duck from the vest pocket of a protesting patron. Fortunately, he has a couple of good Cole Porter songs, a girl who can sing them named Mary Healy and a few satirical thrusts at our English cousins, performed to perfection by Arthur Margetson, to keep the new show at the Adelphi from coming down all over Broadway in a nutter of feathers.

• • •

Welles has never been a stage artist to do things in half measures. He goes what used to be known as the whole hog in "Around the World." From the moment that some thirty-five scenes start whirling around the Fifty-fourth Street stage, the production is a free-for-all. There is a tenuous thread of a plot, as Phileas Fogg beats his way around the globe with double-dealing Dick Fix, "a copper's Knark," on his heels in 1872. There are numerous interruptions, including a Japanese circus, which brings down the first-act curtain in a melange of magic, acrobatics and trick wire walking. All in all, it is a very uneven musical which the producer-author-actor must answer for. In this instance he is more often exhibitionistic than entertaining.

• • •

The best portions of the work are those in which he is not too much in evidence. Margetson does a superb job with the role of Fogg, keeping his British equanimity through funeral pyres, blandishments of Southern California dancing girls and attacks by hostile Indians. If the piece has any quality of genuine travesty about it, it is conveyed by his performance. Miss Healy sings the best song in the offering, "Should I Tell You I Love You," with lovely and lyric simplicity and the dancers are generally on their toes. The scene in which the chorus comes out singing "Wherever They Fly the Flag of Old England" to buck up Fogg in one of his less happy globe-girdling predicament is magnificent. A wealth of talent has been expended on "Around the World." Too often it adds up to tongue-in-cheek antics which are short on laughter.

• • •

The Porter songs are not in the finest Porter tradition, but they serve the plot adequately when it deserves it. The circus number, which permits Welles to indulge in his magic tricks, and has aerialists and acrobats bumping into each other in their gyrations, is as tasteless as it is forced. The occasional romps through the audience by the company are not as funny as such shenanigans should be. Julie Warren and Larry Laurence carry the principal subsidiary roles in the straight story. Victoria Cordova does herself proud as Lola, the proprietress of a dive and Dorothy Bird kicks her heels on occasion. The Robert Davison sets and the Alvin Colt costumes are effective. They clothe too little of engaging entertainment. Wells has a field day in "Around the World," but he does not make it one for spectators.

'AROUND THE WORLD.'

A musical comedy with music and lyrics by Cole Porter and a book adapted by Orson Welles from the novel by Jules Verne; settings by Robert Davison; costumes by Alvin Colt; Circus arranged by Barbette; musical director, Harry Lavant; presented as a Mercury Production by Orson Welles at the Adelphi Theater, Friday evening, May 31, 1946. The cast:

A Bank Robber	Brainerd Duffield
A Police Inspector	Guy Spaull
Dick Fix	Orson Welles
London Bobbies	Nathan Baker, Jack Pitchon, Myron Speth, Gordon West
A Lady	Genevieve Sauris
Mr. Phileas Fogg	Arthur Margetson
Avery Jevity	Stefan Schnabel
Molly Muggins	Julie Warren
Passepartout, a Yankee	Larry Laurence
Mr. Benjamin Cruett-Spaw	Brainerd Duffield
Mr. Ralph Runcible	Guy Spaull
Sir Charles Mandiboy	Bernard Savage
Lord Updifch	Billy Howell
A Servingman	Bruce Cartwright
Another Servingman	Gregory McDougall
A Station Attendant	Billy Howell
Maserablah	Dorothy Bird
Two Dancing Fellas	Lucas Aco, Myron Speth
The British Consul, in Suez	Bernard Savage
An Arab Spy	Stefan Schnabel
A Second Arab Spy	Brainerd Duffield
Snake Charmers	Eddy Di Genova, Victor Savidge, Stanley Turner
A Fakir	Lucas Aco
Maurice Goodpile	Guy Spaull
A Sikh	Spencer James
Mrs. Aouda	Mary Healy
A High Priest	Arthur Cohen
Various Sinister Chinese	Phil King, Billy Howell, Lucas Aco, Nathan Baker
Lee Toy	Jackie Cezanne
Two Daughters of Joy	Lee Morrison, Nancy Newton
Mr. Oka Saka	Brainerd Duffield
Circus Artists—	
The Foot Jugglers	The Three Kanasawa
The Rolling Globe Lady	Adelaide Coral
The Contortionist	Miss Lu
The Hand Balancer	Ishikawa
The Aerialists	Mary Broussard, Lee Vincent, Patricia Leith, Virginia Morris
Assistants	Billy Howell, Lucas Aco, Gregory McDougall, Myron Speth
The Slide for Life	Ray Goody
Clowns—	
Roustabouts	Jack Pitchon, Tony Montell
Mother	Stefan Schnabel
Father	Nathan Baker
Child	Bernie Pisarski
Bride	Cliff Chapman
Groom	Larry Laurence
Minister	Arthur Cohen
Policeman	Jack Cassidy
Monkey Man	Eddy Di Genova
Kimona Man	Allan Lowell
Firemen	Bruce Cartwright, Gordon West
Dragon	Daniel DePaolo
An Attendant	Stanley Turner
A Bartender	Eddy Di Genova
Mexican Dancers	Dorothy Bird, Bruce Cartwright
Lola	Victoria Cordova
Sol	Brainerd Duffield
Sam	Billy Howell
Jim	James Aco
Jake	Spencer James
A Medicine Man	Stefan Schnabel
Other Medicine Men	Barrard Savage, Billy Howell
Jail Guard	Allan Howell

PM Exclusive

JUNE 3, 1946

—Kronenberger

Round the World in 34 Scenes

Orson Welles is not just a man of many bold ideas; he's a man who does something about them. Now he has taken Jules Verne's famous yarn and tried to dynamite it into a super-burlesque of the old-time thriller, and a super-extravaganza for Broadway. There are 34 scenes in *Around the World;* there are movies; there are commotions in the aisles and feathers in the air. There must be a hundred people in the cast, and there are probably 600 scene-shifters backstage.

PM Reviews
AROUND THE WORLD

It would be one hell of an entertainment if only it were more entertaining. I have no quarrel with Mr. Welles' love of noise and size. I enjoy his ingenuity, even when it smacks more of an amusement park than of the stage. I thoroughly admire his showmanship—but it is not quite a substitute for a show. His sawdust elephants and eagles, his exploding firearms and collapsing bridges provide very lively moments; but *Around the World* is an affair of some two and a half hours, and as such it doesn't make the grade.

• • •

Mr. Welles has, I think, put too much stress on his staging and not nearly enough on his script. As burlesque, the dialogue and doings in *Around the World* are very old, very broad beer-and-pretzels stuff, and seldom amusing. Nor is *Around the World* played—except by Arthur Margetson as Phileas Fogg—with any sense of style. Mr. Welles himself plays Dick Fix, the copper's knark, in a variety of disguises; but he is always Mr. Welles cutting up, and after a while quite tiresome.

As extravaganza, *Around the World* is also very much slowed down by its musical-comedy elements without being comparably brightened up. Nelson Barclift's dances are undistinguished, and Cole Porter's score is acutely disappointing. Beyond one pleasant enough romantic tune, *Should I Tell You I Love You,* and a couple of ditties with agreeable lyrics, the music is more a hindrance than a help.

All this is too bad, for much of *Around the World* moves fast and some of its Olsen-&-Johnson shenanigans are fun. There is also an extremely enjoyable circus number, and a funny scene in which Britannia's lady warriors and the U. S. Marines dash in to save Phileas Fogg from the Indians. As Fogg, moreover, Mr. Margetson burlesques British sangfroid and aplomb very neatly; and Mary Healy is pleasing as the Hindu lady Fogg rescues and marries.

But there's something too hollow and half-cocked about Mr. Welles' latest enterprise; and its hotfoot technique eventually leaves you cold. —LOUIS KRONENBERGER

The New York Times

JUNE 1, 1946

THE PLAY

By LEWIS NICHOLS

Although he is an old acquaintance of interplanetary space, Orson Welles has cut himself down to a single world in the new musical opening last evening at the Adelphi. Possibly such close confinement is bad for him; at any rate, "Around the World" is only fitfully amusing. Based roughly on Jules Verne, the story gives Mr. Welles the chance to pour a little of everything upon the stage, but, as in politics, the one world lacks cohesion and a basic plan. It can be said to Mr. Welles' credit, however, that he goes down as a showman should, with pistols blazing, feathers showering on the audience and cymbals clashing.

* * *

Part of the time—the better part, by the way—"Around the World" is a blood brother to "Hellzapoppin'." There is gunplay, broad comedy, a prop bird dragging off an actor, an elephant (papier mâché). Phileas Fogg maintains his English standards as he roams across Europe and America, with Dick Fix, a copper's knark, in pursuit. The Mercury Theatre, whose production it is, has spared no expense in gadgets and effects. There are movies of the flicker era, a miniature train crossing a bridge just before it falls, and desperate men and bold clinging to the rails of pounding ships at sea. In other words, "Around the World" has the makings for an hilarious evening. It does not come off because it lacks unity.

There are too many styles fighting among themselves. Mr. Welles, as Knark Fix, plays the part with vast burlesque and is, himself, very funny at it. He has given Arthur Margetson some amusing lines as Fogg, which that actor plays suavely. The rest of the show wanders off from the comedy, however. The production numbers have an inclination to take themselves seriously; the dances generally are miles removed from Mr. Welles' burlesque. Finally, Cole Porter has written an inferior score, the songs being on the usual musical comedy subjects and delivered without the zest brought to the show by its mainstay. When the guffawing Mr. Welles goes off the stage the show goes with him. A blank stare follows laughter, and that is not good in musical comedy.

* * *

Of the other residents of the world, Mary Healy, Julie Warren and Larry Laurence sing most of Mr. Porter's songs. The best two of these probably are "Should I Tell You I Love You" and "Pipe Dreaming." Nelson Barclift's dances are sedate on the whole, lacking the ten-twent'-thirt' abandon they should have to fit in with the rest of it; Robert Davison's settings are complicated and must move on oiled hinges. Perhaps the best part of the show is a circus, with acrobats, a rope walker and with Mr. Welles, himself, as the magician. This fills the stage, this is what the whole should be. The imagination has traveled "Around the World," but the feet of man, being slower, have lost him the wager.

New York World-Telegram

JUNE 1, 1946

Welles Shoots the Works for Jules Verne

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

"Around the World in Eighty Days," which the Mercury Theater presented last night, is out of the same mold as the British pantomimes, traditional Christmas entertainments for children.

Using a well known story for a framework, they hang on it specialties ranging from ballets to acrobatics to keep the kids spellbound for the holidays.

In this case Mr. Welles based his show on Jules Verne's novel of the same name. It told of the winning of a wager by a sensational trip around the globe.

While Phileas Fogg is racing against time and Dick Fix is chasing him, there are samples of carnivals of many nations. There is faking among the Arabs, a living cremation in India, evil in Hong Kong and a circus in Japan.

Not Very Funny.

There is romance in Mexico and a sacrifice among the American Indians. The journey is related through moving pictures, rushing down the aisles, a series of inset stages, a general mechanical maze of production, and an abundance of shooting.

"Around the World" is one of those ideas that must have seemed hilarious on paper. The trouble is that it is just not very funny. The basic story must have appeared a perfect foundation for humorous situations and nonsensical wit. Instead, for the most part the story is left to produce its own laughs, or is needled by entirely extraneous vaudeville.

One gets the feeling that Mr. Welles, the author, got his characters to a certain spot, then said to himself in desperation, "What must I do now?" Then he answered, "Let's have a circus," or "Let's run another reel of movie," or more frequently, "Let's shoot some more guns off."

Such esoteric motivation is likely to be just distracting.

The cast plays this olio broadly enough, but has to fight the fact that its material is too often imitative of the period it is depicting, the Seventies, rather than being amusingly satirical.

The physical production achieves a flat lithographic effect with its frames and screens and curtains, that admirably sets the quaintness of the time.

Outdoes Olsen and Johnson.

Strangely enough "Around the World" makes an Olsen and Johnson scrimmage seem sophisticated by comparison. Where they are riotous this is frantic. Where this is ingenuous it should be ingenious.

Arthur Margetson comes off with the top playing honors. As Fogg, the racer, he makes this central character a wry and rigid bachelor whose decoruni under any outlandish circumstances is the most authentic humor of the show.

Mr. Welles is Dick Fix, an informer of the police, intent on proving Fogg guilty of his own thievery and making him lose the globular bet. He enjoys himself enormously in a 10-20-30 manner, assuming disguises that range from an Oriental magician to a Wallace Beeryish desert rat. It is all done in a "let's put on a play" spirit.

Sings Porter Song.

Mary Healy makes a lovely Indian princess who is saved from cremation by Mr. Margetson, and later saves him literally from the talons of death when he is captured by an eagle. She sings richly what will be the most popular song in Cole Porter's score, "Should I Tell You I Love You?"

Julie Warren is pert and pretty as an Irish governess who trails after the principal racers. It is a part dragged in by the bustle but she makes herself welcome.

Larry Laurence is a lively good-looking juvenile with vigor and an excellent voice. Like most of the other players he is inclined to bite the microphones until your eardrums beg for mercy.

Victoria Cordova does a neat job on a bit, singing a haunting little refrain called "If You Smile At Me."

Mr. Porter has produced nothing that will be world shaking. "Should I Tell You" is the only number you are likely to hear people humming on the streets, and "There He Goes" has an excellent lyric.

The costumes Alvin Colt has designed are sometimes awkward to the point of being ugly, and the colors have a way of disliking each other's company. But the general effect reminds one of old posters of a grotesquely dressed period.

Choreography is by Nelson Barclift, and Robert Davison is responsible for the intricate mechanics of the settings. The circus sequence was arranged by Barbette, who gives this sequence the confusion and tension of a multi-ringed tent show.

Children will probably love this show. But guns in your ears and feathers in your hair are not mature substitutes for a contagious sense of humor.

DAILY NEWS

JUNE 1, 1946

Orson Welles 'Around the World' A Perfect Musical Extravaganza

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Ever since the war ended I've been dreaming of a trip around the world, by courtesy of Mr. Cook, American Express, Trans-World Airlines, Pan American, rocket-plane or even an old nine-knot Liberty ship. Now I don't want any, because I've had it. Had it courtesy of Orson Welles, and I defy Mr. Cook, TWA or Pan-Am. to make it any faster or half as entertaining.

Mr. Welles presented "Around the World in 80 Days" at the Adelphi Theatre last evening. It is an extravaganza with music by Cole Porter-settings by Robert Davison and book adapted by Mr. Welles from the Jules Verne novel. It is wonderful, exciting and funny, and the most thorough and individual example of showmanship of the season—or of any season since Billy Rose put on "Jumbo" at the Hippodrome. My one great hope is that Lee Shubert, the landlord of the Adelphi, will make the house cool enough for the Summer trade.

The complex details of "Around the World" can be dispensed with in this report with notations that a couple of Mr. Porter's songs are all right, that Arthur Margetson, Mary Healy and Julie Warren are very pleasant principals, and that the plot must have something to do with the Jules Verne original because there is a character in it named Phileas Fogg and he bets he can go around the world in 80 days.

Designer Stars, Too.

Thus brushing aside the details, one comes to the two main items—Mr. Welles and Robert Davison, the scene designer. Mr. Davison has contrived a series of settings—20 scenes in the first act and 14 in the second—which quite miraculously and beautifully keep pace with the jumping-jack mind of the author and producer.

It is the custom to make jokes about Orson Welles—to write about him in columns which are bereft of humor, to chronicle his marriages, to remember his Men from Mars broadcasts, to call him the Boy Wonder because of his still not inconsiderable youth (he is 30).

It is not the custom to treat Mr. Welles very seriously, because he is noisy, naughty, paunchy and opinionated—and this is a pity, for Mr. Welles is a serious topic. He was a very good Mercutio for Katharine Cornell many years ago. His Mercury Theatre and Federal Theatre productions were memorable and stageworthy—his "Julius Caesar" in modern dress being better than Edward G. Robinson in "The Racket." He produced, directed and all but photographed the best film I have seen in a decade, "Citizen Kane," and followed it with a lovely and loving, if commercially unsuccessful, version of the late Booth Tarkington's "The Magnificent Ambersons."

Fabulous Staging.

Mr. Welles has a sense of theatre, a love of theatre, which is exciting—and he has the doggedness to fight through to whatever effect he wants to achieve. He is, in addition to being a publicity-gathering screwball, a thoroughgoing perfectionist, and the technical details of his staging of "Around the World" are fabulous.

And then, having written, produced and directed the show, he also acts in it; acts as Dick Fix, a copper's nark, as a Japanese magician in a wonderful Yokohama circus scene, as a wild and woolly bad man of the Rocky Mountain West. And always, being the man of the theatre he is, he points up whatever scene he is involved in.

Mr. Margetson, as Phileas Fogg, is delightful, and Mlles. Healy and Warren are charming companions for a quick trip around the globe. If I wanted a stopover in any one place, I'd take the circus in Yokohama, which ends the first act. It may not be art, but it's mighty fine show business.

The Sun

JUNE 1, 1946

'Around the World' by Orson Welles and Cole Porter Has Premiere at Adelphi.

Orson Welles took the Broadway first-nighters on a dizzy globe-circling jaunt last evening as the Mercury Theater's production of "Around the World" had its premiere at the Adelphi Theater, and he had the time of his life doing it. If there is any theatrical stunt Welles has overlooked in placing behind the footlights Jules Verne's old novel of Phileas Fogg's eighty-day race around this planet, it's a little hard to name it at the moment.

It was a foregone conclusion that the man who once scared the daylights out of part of his radio audience with his portrayal of an invasion from Mars and who also gave the American theater a production of 'Julius Caesar" to applaud and remember would come up with something out of the ordinary for his return to Manhattan, and he has. He himself describes his show as a "musical extravaganza." That does about as well as anything to cover his high powered concoction.

To cross all the territory involved in the Jules Verne story and keep his production fast moving, Welles has hit upon the ingenious idea of having a second proscenium arch set up on the Adelphi stage. Much of the evening's action takes place on this secondary stage, and when its curtain is lowered for a change of scene, either Welles's actors come popping out of doors at the side onto the main stage or a panel at the side lifts to reveal a scene presented as it were in miniature. He has also used the old time silent movies skillfully to further his involved plot, and some of these shots, satirical and humorous in vein, are a delight.

The very freshness of the presentation got the evening off to a fast start, but once Fogg was on his way the proceedings bogged down considerably despite all the frenzy. Some of Welles's efforts to lampoon the old story just didn't come off, and his momentary dips into straight musical comedy often were woefully routine. But just when his show gave signs of slipping into the doldrums, he came up with a stunning circus number to ring down his first act curtain. During this scene Welles tried his hand at being a magician, and carried it off in top style.

At this point Welles found even his secondary stage too small for him and the action began, spilling over into the audience. Taking a leaf from Olsen and Johnson he had an actor who a moment before had been sitting quietly out front rise to fire a telling shot, and much of the second act is definitely "Helizapoppin" in style. It also contains one of the show's funniest numbers. When Fogg is kidnaped by the Ojibway Indians and the United States Marines of the vintage of the 70's come trooping down the aisles to the rescue, while the girl chorus backs Fogg up in singing Cole Porter's delightful "Wherever They Fly the Flag of Old England," "Around the World" is at its best.

All of Welles's goings on unfortunately tend to submerge Porter's score. Both in lyrics and melody his "There He Goes, Mr. Phileas Fogg" is one of the show's assets, however, and his "Should I Tell You I Love You?", charmingly sung by Mary Healy, is one you'll be meeting often. He has also composed a lively foot-tapper in "Look What I Found."

As Dick Fix, the villain of the piece, who pursues Fogg around the globe, Welles has a field day, deliberately hamming the role unmercifully, and not always being quite as funny as he intended. Just the same its hard to figure where he'll find another player to take his place when his present pinch-hitting is over. The evening's acting honors in the huge cast are easily carried off by Arthur Margetson, who is perfect throughout as the unperturbed Fogg. Larry Laurence makes a refreshing Passepartout, the gdobe-trotter's Yankee man servant, and has a good voice for his songs. Miss Healy, too, acts as well as she sings as Mrs. Aouda, the Indian princess.

If you are not too gun-shy and get pleasure out of theatrical high-jinks, "Around the World" should be our whirl, despite its lapses along the way.

HERRICK BROWN.